

DEVELOPMENTS AND POSSIBILITIES
IN BRAILLE
Watson, D. W.

HV1669
.W38
1932

HV1669
W

HV1669
W



AMERICAN FOUNDATION
FOR THE BLIND INC.

"Let Us Buy Life, Health, Happiness"

AN accurate and true conception of a fundamental obligation of Americans today was voiced in a message to the club women of Ohio by the president of the Ohio Federation of Women's Clubs asking support of the Red Cross Roll Call:

"Today is the day of sacrifice. If we have but a little we must give that little to those who have nothing. Joining the Red Cross is one of many ways to help. Let us be peace patriots. *Let us buy life and health and happiness* for the needy citizens of America with our memberships in the Red Cross."

This stimulating message is from the pen of Mrs. Ethel Cotton Schwartz, the president of the Ohio Federation of Women's Clubs. Surely her call to women to buy life, health and happiness with Red Cross memberships is a conception of the power of humanitarianism as correct as it is expressive of the self-imposed, voluntary duty which is the keystone of the arch of the Red Cross structure.

The Partisan "Axe" Deeply Buried

THAT the neutrality of Red Cross softens even the most intensive partisanship is the testimony of fact deduced in the Roll Call organization which functioned in an Indiana county. The set-up for the workers comprised the trustee of each township who had served on the drought relief committee as township chairman for the Roll Call. The townships are politically divided into voting precincts which have a committeeman representing each of the major parties, who as Roll Call workers were responsible for their precincts. This arrangement was recommended by the county chairmen. And no precinct chairman declined to work for the Roll Call. The partisan "axe" was so deeply buried that it was generally remarked that it took the Red Cross to get opposed precinct committeemen to work together in perfect harmony.

COURIER—received from an Eastern Area Chapter.

The radiogram was received by station W3CXM at Alexandria, Va., and immediately transmitted to the Signal Corps at Washington. For the information of our Chapters, the legend printed at the bottom of the radio blank used by the Signal Corps is quoted: "The Army Amateur Radio System is a nation-wide network of patriotic expert amateur radio operators voluntarily affiliated with the Signal Corps, United States Army. It affords rapid emergency communication to the American Red Cross in time of disaster."

Signal Honor Conferred on Chapter Chairman

TO HAVE been the choice of the representatives of 25 local organizations as the citizen who contributed the most outstanding civic service during the year 1931 is a rare honor. Such high mark of esteem has been conferred upon the Rev. G. E. Jones, chairman of the Hamilton County Chapter, by the Kiwanis Club, of Noblesville, Ind. With the civic service medal presented to Mr. Jones came this citation:

"Your unselfish service in connection with the following organizations: American Red Cross, Travelers Aid Association, Child Health Association, Anti-Tuberculosis Association, Unemployment Relief Association, and the Daily Bible School; your daily calls on all patients at the local hospital and frequent inspirational and cheering visits to the inmates of the local jail, and your countless other and untold services of kindness and succor to the needy, has led this community, through representatives of all its leading organizations, to select you its citizen who in 1931 has contributed the most outstanding civic service; and as a mark of love, esteem, and appreciation, and for the above-cited acts now awards you this Kiwanis Civic Service Citation Medal."

Mr. Jones is nationally known to the Red Cross, for he has been a speaker at numerous Red Cross regional conferences and

HV 1675
W
copy 1
Red Cross Courier
Vol XI, No. 7, Jan. 1932

Developments and Possibilities in Braille

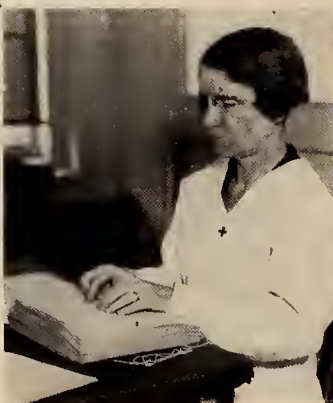
By MRS. D. W. WATSON*

Chairman of Braille, Madison, N. J., Chapter, American Red Cross

SOME months ago the fiftieth anniversary of the birth of the electric light was celebrated. All peoples of the world benefited by the development which brought greater light into the lives of the sighted. In Europe at the same time there was a celebration of the one-hundredth birthday of Braille, one of the greatest inventions of man, which brought light into the lives of those who were in total darkness. As I listened to the Edison broadcast, my mind traveled to Europe and compared the two celebrations. How few sighted people there were who even knew about Braille, or what it means to the blind to "see" through their finger tips. How few people there were who were interested in bringing any light into the lives of those in darkness. How many, many idle hands there were that might be live wires transmitting electric light into the lives of the blind!

A hundred years ago those without sight were afflicted with a curse far greater than blindness—that of idleness. They were entirely cut off from some of the greatest joys of life. Perhaps too frequently in the past, we have thought of the blind as in one class—that of the mendicant on the street corner with a tin cup. Today there is light! Today the blind seek education and employment that they may earn their living and maintain their self-respect and take their places side by side with those blessed with sight. Seeing humanity owes them this right.

No more heroic figure emerged from the World War than the blinded soldier. It must have taken more courage to face the outlook of spending the remainder of life in darkness than to have stood opposite the enemy in the front-line trenches. It was at this critical time that the Red Cross volunteer workers were enlisted to transcribe books into Braille to enable the blinded soldier to link the old-life with the new. Through Braille he caught the first ray of hope for the future. He had to readjust his thought and train his brain to travel through the



The expert blind proof-reader at her work.

medium of touch and read the raised dots with his finger-tips. Because he had lost one sense, that of sight, he had not lost the remaining four senses. They were only idle because they had been dependent upon sight for guidance. And so on those magic dots depended the activity and usefulness of his remaining senses.

The Red Cross nurse is a well-known figure the world over, but the woman sitting at her Braille writer copying books for the blind is a comparatively new picture in Red Cross work. The first small band of volunteers has grown into an army of more than 1,200 certified workers and an increasing number of students.

Transcribing, although it can be learned in ten lessons, is really not easy; but the average person can master it. To do the accurate work required one must have patience and perseverance, the ability to concentrate, and to exercise care in small details. The

work stimulates the activity of the mind, it is fascinating and because it is the giving of oneself, it is inspiring and uplifting.

Louis Braille, the developer of the alphabet that bears his name, was born in Paris. He became blind at the age of three and was educated at a Paris institute for blind children, where he later became a teacher. At the age of 16 he worked out this system that is used for both reading and writing, and has now been adapted to the language of every civilized nation. This alphabet is based on the grouping of varying combinations of six raised dots, in a rectangular space—three dots high and two wide. Each character, according to the arrangement of the dots, represents a letter, group of letters or a whole word.

IN OUR Red Cross Volunteer Service work we produce Braille in three ways: First, with a slate and stylus; second, by a writer; third, by

duplication. The beginner generally learns on the slate. It is inexpensive and portable, but rather laborious, as only one dot at a time can be made. On the writer, which resembles a type-writing machine, an entire character can be made at a single stroke. Books embossed on paper in this manner are spoken of as hand-copied books, and but one copy can be written at a time. Six years ago a new method known as the Garin process of duplication was introduced. By this method a paper plate was made from which many impressions could be taken. Printing presses were put into operation in four



Three volunteers using the Braille writer and two producing pages with slate and stylus.

* Mrs. Watson gave a most interesting address at a regional conference last Autumn held at Fort Monmouth, N. J. THE COURIER appreciates its opportunity to print the substance of her address. The illustrations are from photographs of the Braille activities of the New York Chapter.

Chapters—New York, Philadelphia, Washington, and Madison, N. J. Books produced by this method are sold to libraries for the cost of the material—about \$1 a volume. The method of processing the paper plate for duplication by the Garin system is a very long and tedious one. After making several hundred plates by this method, I decided to seek a shorter, less laborious way. After many months of experimenting, a metal plate which required no processing was adapted for use on the Braille writer. Such plates are ready for printing as soon as transcribed. It takes only little longer to transcribe a volume on metal plates than to make a hand-copied volume that can not be reproduced.

TWO YEARS ago the Madison Chapter, in cooperation with American Junior Red Cross, reproduced in Braille on metal plates the book "Friends in Strange Garments," written by Anna Milo Upjohn, the beloved artist for many years with the Junior Service. Eighty-three copies, or 250 volumes, have been printed and orders are coming in all the time. These books were purchased by the Juniors and presented to schools for blind children over the United States. In some cases the sighted children were near enough to a school for the blind to present the books personally, giving them an opportunity to visit those less fortunate than themselves. The blind children showed their appreciation by entertaining the visitors with songs and recitations.

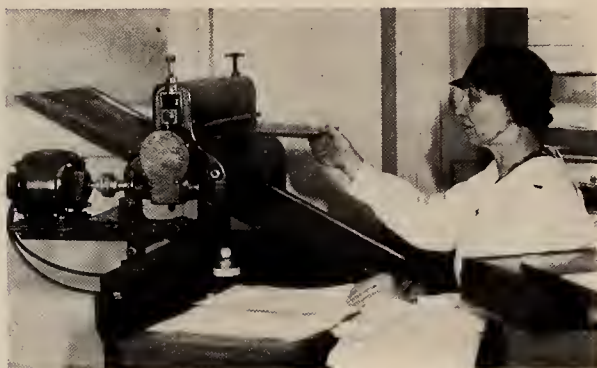


Shellacking and backing the plates used in the duplicating press.

The opportunities in the field of duplication are unlimited. A volunteer worker of Cleveland, hearing of the work on the metal plate, came to Madison. He was transcribing music into Braille for a blind instructor of music of the blind children in the public schools. They were laborously writing each lesson for each child by hand, dot by dot on a slate. From one transcription on a metal plate all the copies needed were reproduced. A blind director in the schools in Minneapolis was also assisted in adapting the metal plate for use in his school work.

Several years ago, before the development of duplication, I made for the blind children in an orphanage in Armenia a hand copy of a reader for each grade, from the primer to the seventh grade, also a volume of "Mother Stories." These were done dot by dot on paper with a slate and stylus. If the one copy had been transcribed on metal plates, I could have reproduced a copy for each child. The work was, however, deeply appreciated, for in a letter from the superintendent, she wrote: "We are moving into our new blind school this week. You can not imagine what a change the school has made in the children.

Whereas they used to sit on the orphanage floor all day long, sometimes crawling out into the sun, now they walk all about the campus, they get together in groups to practise their music lessons, and shout English words at each other. They are very gay and happy, and even get into mischief, like sighted children. In the regular dormitories the children are allowed a few candles, besides the regular kerosene lamps, for going back and



The duplicating press which prints many copies from a single plate.

forth, etc. The blind children heard of this, and one evening three or four of them got together and marched up and down past the manager's room, shouting, 'How dark it is here! Why doesn't the manager give us our candles? We might fall down and break our necks!' Don't you think that shows a sense of humor?

"May I thank you all again for helping us in our work. I wish I could tell you how worthwhile it is, and how much every little bit of help counts. It always comes as a surprise to me to find that busy people way back home are interested in what we are doing here. Of course that interest is the only thing that keeps us going."

OCCASIONALLY I am invited by the chairman of Braille of a New Jersey Chapter to go over and see what she terms "my grandchildren." This ambitious chairman, also entered the field of duplication. Not having a press available, an electric clothes mangle was finally adapted for use. The following year, however, a press was loaned to the Chapter. Their activities are so varied that I give a part of the report as it was sent to me:

"We have transcribed on aluminum 12 fairy tales, from which we have printed 166 booklets. Most of these have been given to the blind children in the day schools of New Jersey. We have also contributed Brailled calendars and poems for the adults' Christmas party for two years. 'Handcraft,' a book of directions for knitting, crocheting and tatting, was transcribed by two of our members on aluminum. From these plates we have printed 80 volumes and given them to the home teachers of ten States. We hope to give them to all of the home teachers in the United States.

"We have transcribed and printed many copies of poems desired by a public school of Paterson, and an arithmetic for beginners. We have also made single copies of a United States history, spelling for the fifth, sixth, and seventh grades, kindergarten work and mental tests; have printed 53 copies of the program for the meeting of the blind home teachers of the Eastern District of the United States, and have designed upon aluminum and printed 700 Christmas Cards."

Other Chapters specialize in French books, works in German, the classics, law notes, algebra, etc., for blind students. Although I mention only the special work done by some of the

Chapters, the scope of the work and the open field for development are unlimited. There are many women doing regular work of transcribing fiction, etc., whose output is just as important and as much appreciated. No commercial value can be put upon the text-books transcribed for students seeking an education under so heavy a handicap.

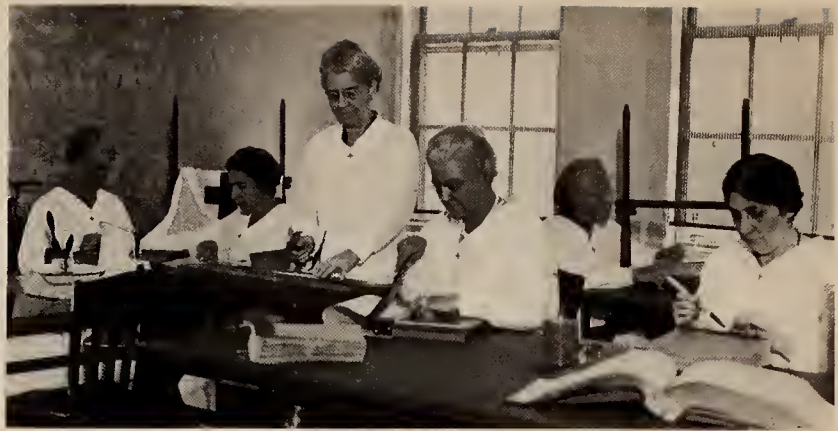
TRANScribing brings the workers in direct touch with the blind reader and enables them to know the real value of their work. Perhaps a quotation from Helen Keller's book, "Midstream," will speak appreciation for all the blind. In mentioning the work of the Red Cross transcriber, she says:

"No such splendid service as that offered by the Red Cross was available for blind students 25 years ago. If it had been there would have been fewer shadows of discontent and more liberty in my work. One insurmountable obstacle confronted me throughout my college career, the lack of books in raised letters. Each volume in Braille was a treasure island to me. In the New York Public Library there are more than 2,000,000 titles for the sighted, but only 1,250 for the blind in standard Braille. Many of the Braille volumes of the library are transcribed by individuals, and are available only in single copies. A most touching story of human kindness is the zeal with which hundreds of people master Braille, and give up their hours of leisure to transcribe books for the sightless.

"The blind can now work; they can study; they can sing; they can add their share to the good and happiness in the world, and it was Louis Braille, a captive bearing a yoke as cruel as their own, who found the golden key to unlock their prison door! Braille's invention was as marvelous as any fairy tale. Only six dots! Yet when he touched a blank sheet of paper it became alive with words that sparkled in the darkness of the blind! Only six dots! Yet he made them vibrate with harmonies that charmed away lonely hours. Only six dots! Yet the fruit of his genius gave to the blind the power of mighty vehicles of thought. With them he captured words that weave bonds of companionship between those who can not see, and those who can: words that like swift ships bear us far away from the monotony of blindness, the trivial incidents of time and place, and the pain of baffled effort!"

MANY persons ask what sort of books the blind like to read. If the reader suddenly went blind, what sort of books would he like to read? Would he like to read the same type of books all the time? No, for taste varies with mood, sometimes one wants history, sometimes fiction, sometimes philosophy, etc. One woman complained to me that "people seem to think we should read nothing but our Bibles and religious books because we are blind." When I ask a blind person what sort of books he likes best, invariably the reply is "fiction." A sighted person is constantly receiving through the eye "thrills" of every sort—thrills of action; thrills from beautiful scenes, from beautiful colors. The blind, deprived of these sensations, seek their thrills in fiction. One day I called on a well-educated woman who was blind and found her reading "Buffalo Bill" in Braille. I asked if she enjoyed it. "Oh, yes," she replied. "Such action, such thrills!"

"Books are gates to lands of pleasure," whether one reads them by eye or finger tip and there must be variety to maintain that pleasure. As I go among the blind I hear the constant cry for books and more books. Look back, for a moment, through



Binding Braille books entails many processes that require meticulous care.

your own lives. What part has books played in your pleasure, outside of education? When you were a child didn't you take a much-loved book to bed with you? Did you never cautiously read a book by a dimmed light, when your mother thought you fast asleep? The little blind children in the schools and institutions have almost no books of their own. The few books on the library shelves must be returned when read. The Madison Chapter has undertaken to fill this want in the lives of the children, in cooperation with the American Junior Red Cross. Its braillists are transcribing little stories to be presented as personal gifts to children in various institutions. The stories have been written on metal plates and printed by the Madison Chapter. They will be bound by the different Junior sections in our Chapters in bright paper covers tied with soft silken cord. The blind love color just as well as the sighted do. They sense it from some picture in their minds when it is described to them. It helps to give variety to their drab lives.

THE volunteer transcriber works quietly producing books that are the means of enriching the lives of those blinded, lifting them out of the pit of darkness into light, giving hope, means of livelihood, joy and pleasure. Is not this relief work of great value? Is not this development of reading and writing for the blind a marvel? This development from the early string-writing to our present system of Braille, or the writing of each letter, dot by dot, to our present system of duplication? The future promises greater developments. We are clamoring for better machines, for less laborious methods in printing, for more workers and for the best work that can be produced.

And what are the dividends? Let me draw two pictures for you: The first—a woman sitting at the card table. Her dividend? A possible bridge prize, something to dust. The second picture—a woman sitting before a Braille writer. She is dressed in white; there is a red cross on her head-dress. Her dividend? Deep appreciation from those with whom she has exchanged soul for soul. She has not had to pay an expert to help her win *this* prize, for the lessons are free. And she *can not possibly lose*. We agree with the worker who said that she wanted no greater epitaph on her tombstone than "*She Brailled a Book.*"



"WHEREVER human beings suffer there goes the Red Cross. Wherever goes the Red Cross there goes the heart of America. You and I are the Red Cross. You and I are the heart of America."—The Rt. Rev. John T. Dallas, Episcopal Bishop of New Hampshire.

Bro-Dart INDUSTRIES
Newark 8, N. J. • Los Angeles 25, Calif.
Toronto 6, Ontario
Made in U.S.A.

